K9 and the ZETA RESCUE

DAVID MARTIN

FROM: Gallifrey Databank
TO: Gallifrey High Command

CLASSIFICATION: Most Secret

SUBJECT: K9
HISTORY: Robot dog designed and first constructed by a certain Professor Marius (type: Earth, male) in year 5000 A.D. Built as a mobile computer unit and pet replacement. Later modified by Time Lord Theta Sigma (also known as 'The Doctor') to improve performance.

POTENTIAL USE: Now capable of independent missions in situations classed as too dangerous for Time Lord intervention.

EQUIPMENT: Sophisticated polysensory tracking systems. Self-energising drive and decision-making capability. Multi-phase photon-blaster infinitely variable from 'immobilisation' to 'dematerialisation'.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: Spacecraft K-NEL. Ion rocket motors (3) only. No time-travel facility. Operated as extension of K9's central computer. No armaments. Shape, smooth triangular block. Colour, white. Speed: UNDISCLOSED.

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British Broadcasting Corporation

K9

and the

ZETA RESCUE

DAVID MARTIN

SPARROW
BOOKS

'K9 return to Control! We have an emergency. K9 return to Control immediately!'

K9 was flight-testing his new spacecraft K-NEL when the space controller's voice shrieked in his receivers.

Another panic, thought K9, and put the message through for computer checking. The robot dog had saved Time Lords many times in the past: he knew that sometimes their enemies sent fake calls for help. But this time the computer recorded, 'CRISIS GENUINE: OBEY AT ONCE!'

With a wag of his tail, K9 flicked the gleaming white craft into a dive towards Gallifrey.

'Crisis noted,' he told the controller. 'Test flight completed. Landing now.'

The ground crew scattered as K-NEL came in at full power. But the touch-down was faultless, as K9 knew it would be. The spacecraft was the product of years of work by the finest engineers in the galaxy and could travel at close to the speed of light. All the controls were directly linked to K9's central computer so that K-NEL would obey his commands instantly. As soon as K9 thought of a manoeuvre, K-NEL would perform it, with a speed that would often save K9 from destruction.

The name, K-NEL, was the Doctor's idea.

Leaving the craft, K9 sped into the Control Centre. Three grim-faced Time Lords and the space controller were waiting for him. The controller wasted no time. 'We're getting reports of massive explosions in Zeta Four Sector,' he said. 'Our computers predict that two of the stars in the triple cluster will collide if the explosions continue. And if Zeta Cancri goes nova the whole galaxy will be blown apart.'

K9 had seen stars go nova. All their energy went up at once, in one enormous whoosh, destroying everything for billions of miles.

'Such things,' observed K9 with his usual calm, 'are in the nature of the cosmos. Catastrophe theory predicts — '

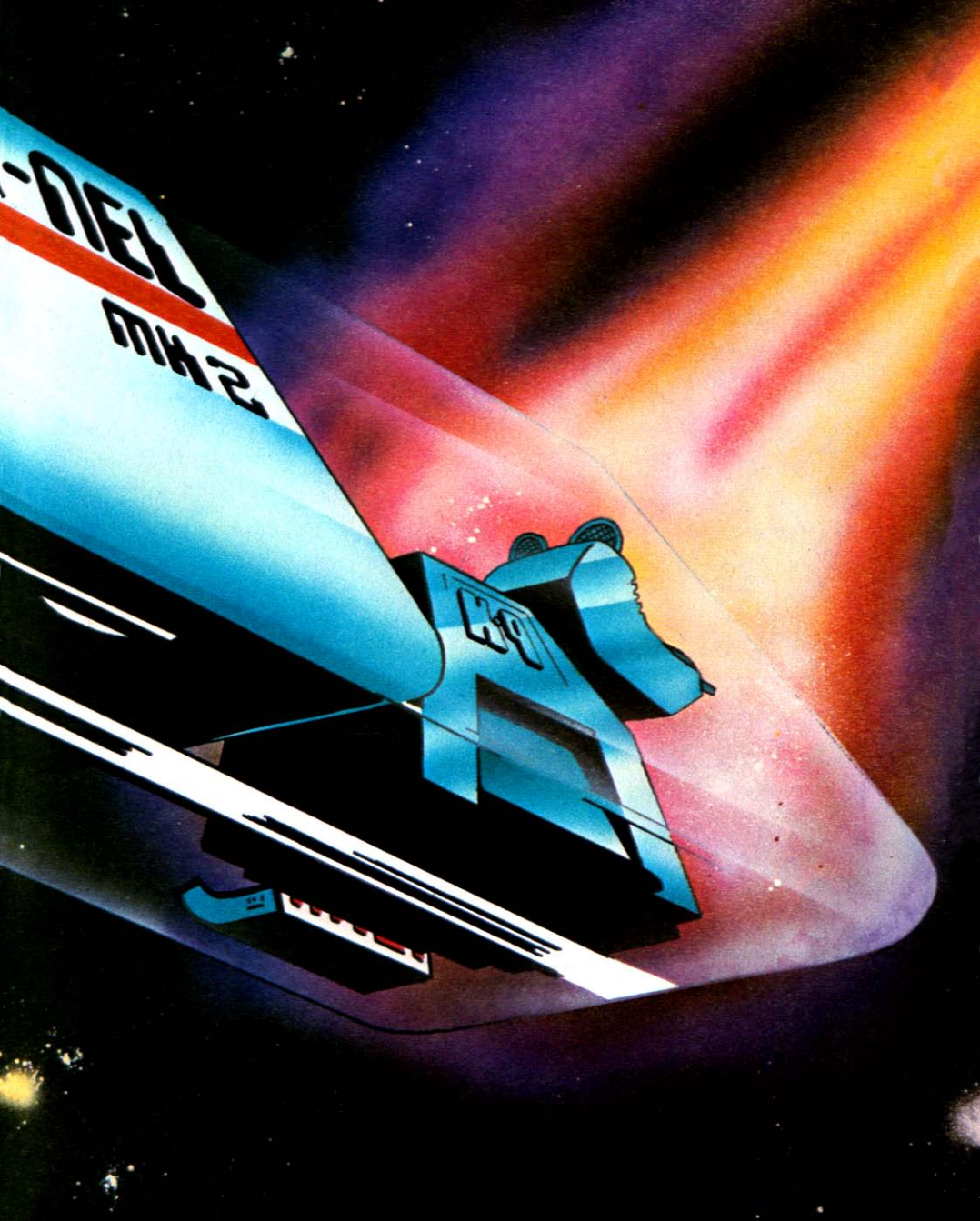
'K9,' the leader of the Time Lords interrupted, 'we think the explosions are man-made. We have received a distress call. The situation is too dangerous for us to handle. You must go for us, to save our civilisation and our galaxy. Will you do it?'

K9 thought for a moment. 'Affirmative,' he replied.

Seconds later K9 blasted off in K-NEL. He set the coordinates for Zeta Four, and the power at maximum. As he sped through space he wondered as always why humanoids, even the mighty and immortal Time Lords, became agitated when danger threatened. If things grew dangerous, thought K9, one should remain calm, and in complete control.

Reaching Zeta Four Sector, he slowed down to check his position. 'DANGER! DANGER!' flashed his computer, 'EXTREME DANGER!'

Behind K-NEL a tidal wave of white-hot rock had reared up out of nowhere and was flinging itself down towards the fragile spacecraft in a ball of flaming gas.



With barely a millisecond to spare, K9 pulled the wildly veering K-NEL up above the wall of flaming rock and levelled out. Down below, fragments of the ruined sector were spread through trillions of miles across the galaxy. Here and there he could see the wreckage of fleets of rocket ships, drifting through the chaos. As he watched, another living world blew up and vanished into space. Asteroids burned like cities on a black plain. Planets exploded like giant puffballs.

The Time Lords were right, decided K9. It was war made by man that had caused such destruction. Therefore, he reasoned, man must be stopped. If there were any men left alive.

His sensors twitched. K9 picked up the signal. It was faint, no more than a 'blip' now and again, fading away to nothing. It had to be an automatic distress call, thought K9. Nothing else could have survived such destruction.

He put his sensors on maximum range. Blip. Blip.

And then, unbelievably, a faint human voice. 'Help. Help me.' Then it was gone. But K9 had fixed its position: right in the centre of the whirlpool of gas and molten rock.

Without hesitating, K9 dived into it.

Relying on speed to carry him through, K9 plunged down into the sea of molten rock. The hull of K-NEL blistered in the intense heat. He came out on the lip of the whirlpool, shot down the funnel at its centre. Down, down, down, he spun. As he hurtled faster and faster round the tunnel walls, K9 tried to home in on the signal far below.

Suddenly he flew out into thick, soft, black, velvety darkness. He was at the dead centre of the whirlpool. K-NEL slowed, wallowed, drifted.

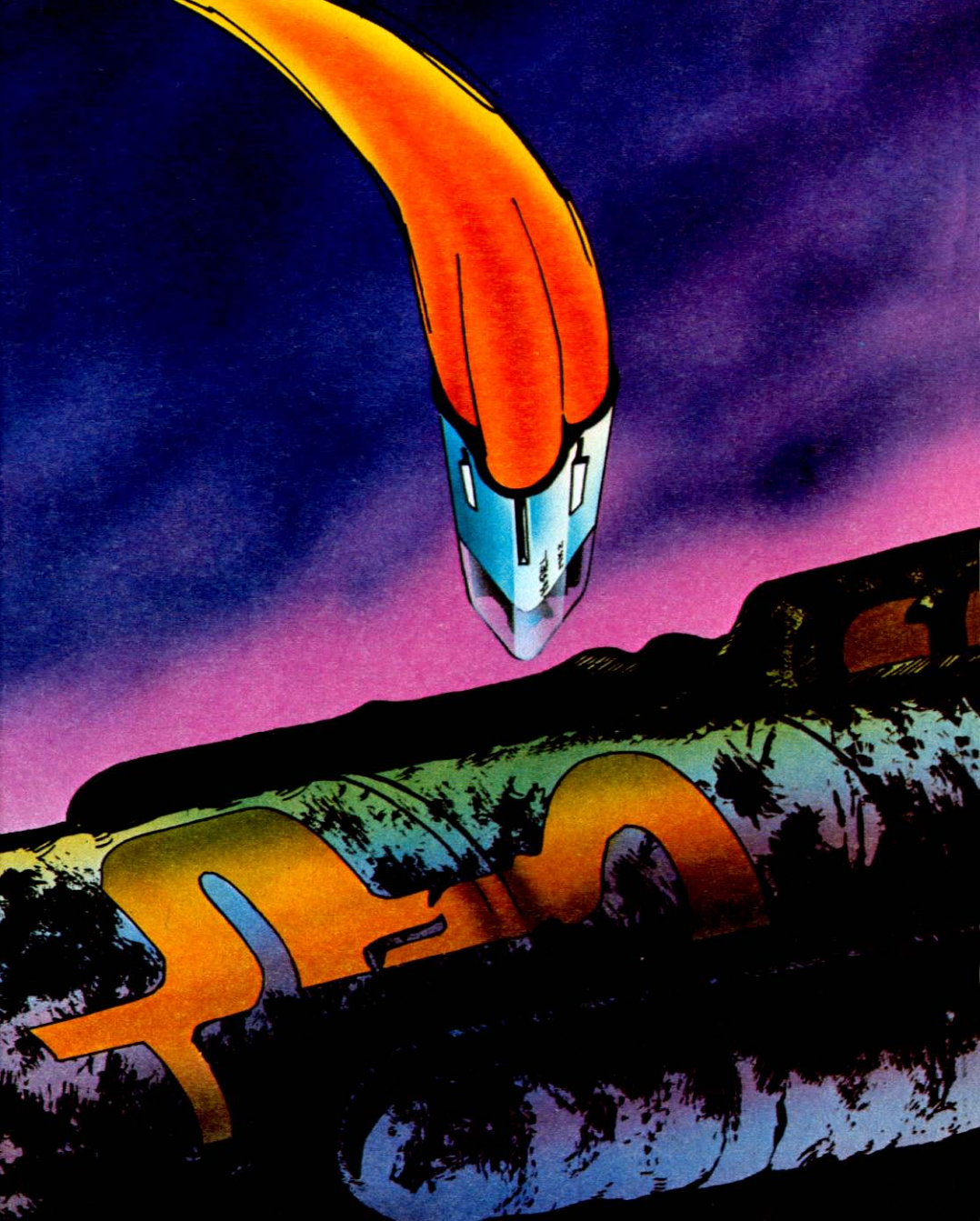
Clunk. K-NEL hit something solid.

TSUM
2 MW

K-NEL's magnetic pads clamped themselves on to the mysterious object. Sensors on full alert, K9 left his craft to explore. It was an alien vessel of some kind, its hull hideously scarred in battle, its surfaces pitted and crazed like old enamel. K9's sensors told him the armour-plated hull was immensely thick. He finished his exploration. There was no doubt in K9's mind now. Only one thing could have stood up to such a battering: a prison ship of the Megallan Empire. The Megallan Empire — K9's memory banks whirred — the Empire whose sole aim was domination, the Empire whose warriors were feared more than death itself, the Empire whose leaders had sworn to destroy the Time Lords . . .

Blip. Blip. 'Help me. Help me someone.'

The cry came from within.

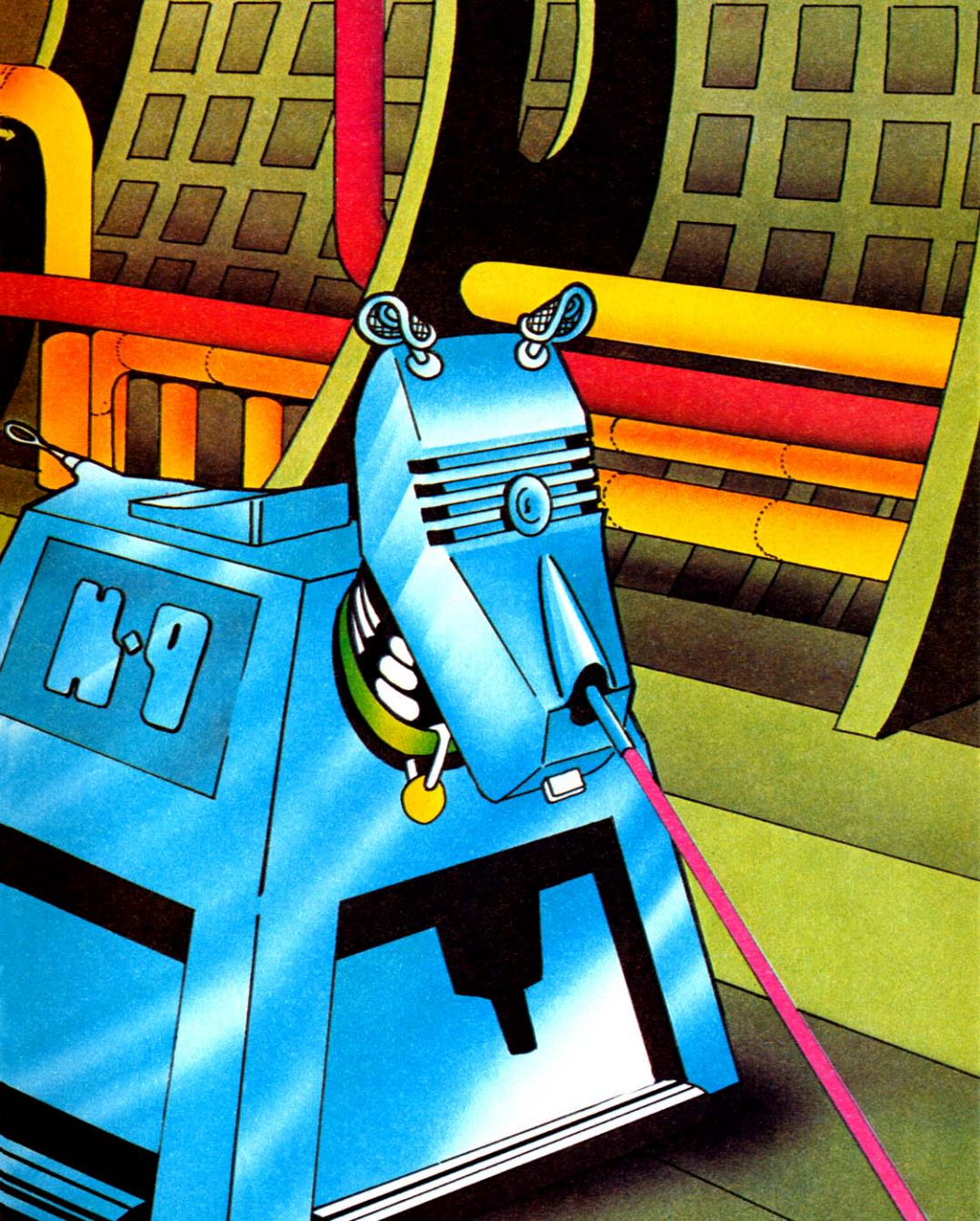


But there **was** no way in: as K9 expected, the vast prison ship had been built without entrances of any kind. Prisoners were teleported in. That way they could not escape.

K9 began to blast his way through the hull. Hours later his photon-laser had cut a small glowing hole through the diamond-hard hull. The work had been hard and his power reserves were dangerously low. He prepared himself for the final blast.

'Help me . . . help me . . .'

As the faint cries floated up, he finally broke through into the prison ship.



A girl stood fastened to the walls by hoops of glassy material. It was as though the cell itself had grown around her neck, arms and feet. A dead guard lay on the floor, a transmitter in his hand blipping out the distress call.

With the last of his power, K9 freed her. She said her name was Dea, from the planet Telios. She had been sent as an ambassador to prevent the war, but the Megallans had imprisoned her.

Weakened by his efforts, K9 could hardly speak. 'Unless . . . there is . . a power source . . . neither of us . . . will escape.'

Dea led K9 through the narrow twisting passages inside the ship. There were signs of fighting everywhere.

Both sides, Dea explained, had declared war at the same moment. In the nuclear battle that followed, both planets had been blown to fragments. The explosions had set off other explosions in a chain reaction. Now the prison ship was all that remained of either civilisation. The Megallan High Command had retreated to the prison ship to make a final stand, but the Telians had seized the teleport station and pursued them.

'If the Megallans are defeated,' said Dea, 'they have programmed the ship to detonate.'

K9 made a quick calculation. The Time Lords were right, as usual. The force of the explosion would cause the stars of Zeta Cancri to collide and wipe out the whole galaxy, including Gallifrey. There was no time to lose!

Blaster fire rang out from the power centre. Dea dragged K9 towards it.

An amazing sight met their gaze. Among the many dead, two men remained alive: the marshal of Telios and the Megallan warlord, struggling with each other in a fight to the death.

Countless millions had been killed. Both civilisations destroyed, dozens of planets ceased to exist — and still, thought K9, these two fight on.

The Megallan warlord fell, mortally wounded. The the marshal of Telios collapsed on top of him. They lay locked together even in death.

'Peace at last,' observed K9.

Then, deep within the power source, something began to tick.

With Dea's help, K9 linked himself to the power source. As his strength returned, he found and defused the device planted by the Megallans. Dea stood watching in silence.

'Come,' said K9, 'it is time to go now.'

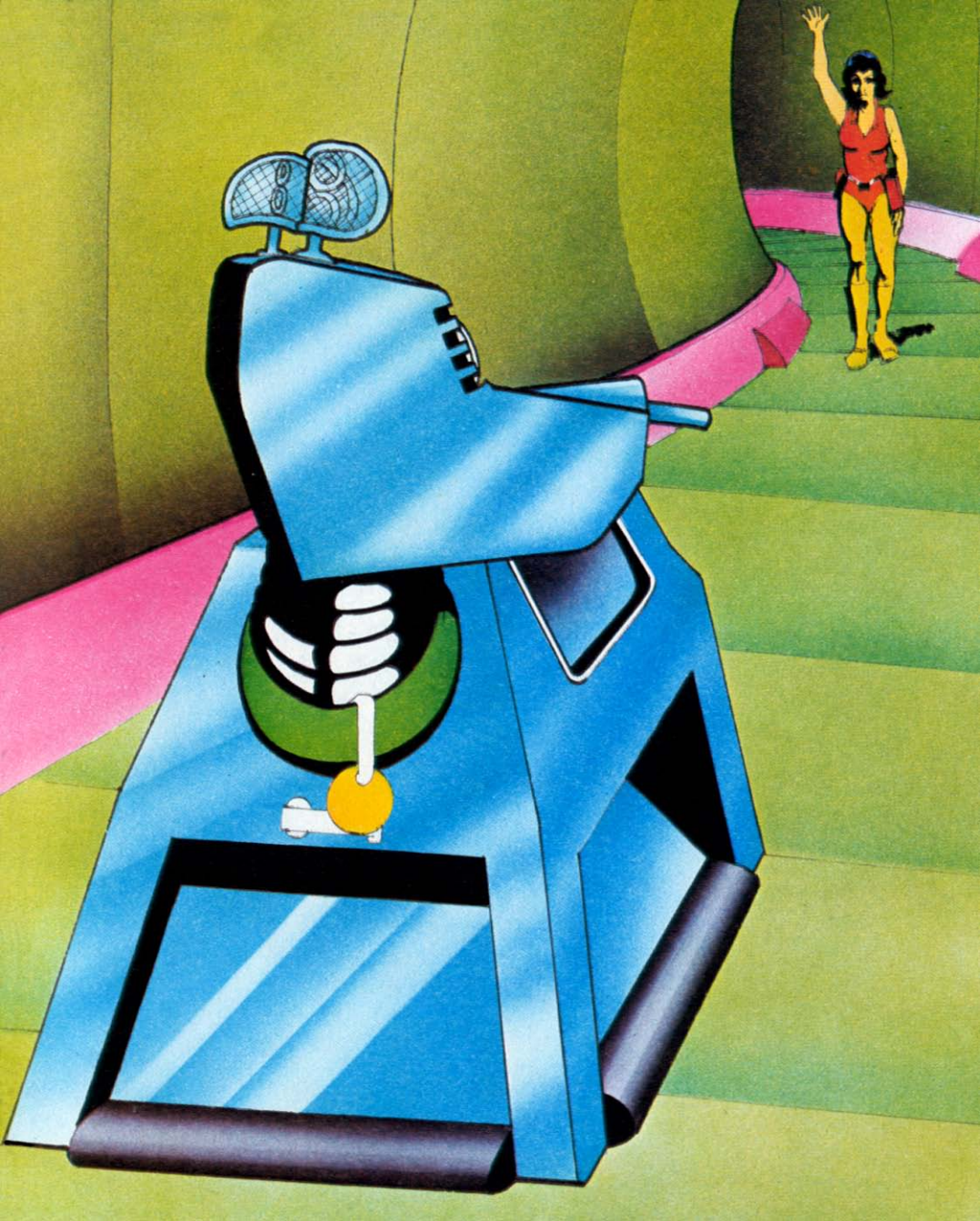
Dea did not move. 'No,' she said, 'I cannot go with you. My place is here.'

'Decision illogical,' said K9. 'You were a prisoner here.'

'There may be other prisoners here, still alive. Or wounded soldiers,' said Dea. 'I must stay and try to help them.'

'As you wish,' said K9.

He trundled away, shaking his head. Humanoids, he decided, were impossible.



It was while K9 was on his way out of the prison ship that he did something he had never done before. He changed his mind.

'I have returned,' he told Dea, 'because it would be illogical to make a rescue trip in which no one is rescued. Besides which, flying conditions are hopeless.''

Dea smiled. When K9 did leave, he and Dea had made the prison ship into a hospital, and the few survivors of the great battle had begun to recover.

BLOOD

Back on Gallifrey K9 was making his report to the space controller. 'The situation in Zeta Sector Four is now under control. The gas clouds have dispersed and the whirlpool has been neutralised. The triple star system of Zeta Cancri is once again completely stable.''

'You were sent to answer a distress call, were you not?'

'Affirmative.'

'What took you so long?'

'I was attempting the impossible,' said K9.

'Which is?'

'The understanding of the humanoid race.'

'Your result?' asked the controller.

'Negative,' said K9.

K-9

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